THE AUCTION:

A TOWN ECLOGUE.

BY THE HONOURABLE Mr. ——

By Wm. Combe.

THE THIRD EDITION.

AND AS THE HEAPS OF FURNITURE GO BY,
TAX IT, YE GREEDY MINISTERS, I CRY.

CAMBRIDGE.

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TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

LADY V—LL—RS,

THE FOLLOWING PAGES

ARE DEDICATED BY

HER LADYSHIP'S

MOST OBEDIENT AND

MOST HUMBLE SERVANT,

THE AUTHOR.

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THE PREFACE.

A LATE excellent Comedian being aſked by a Nobleman who was at his table, how much his ſide-board of Plate might have coſt him, replied, That this circumſtance had really eſcaped his memory; but he believed, in a ſhort time, he ſhould be able to inform his Lordſhip how much it would fetch to a ſhilling. This ſituation ſeems to be a very common one among our Men of Rank and Figure:—Extravagance is now reduced to Syſtem; ſo that few young men ſet out upon the career of the Ton, but calculations are made, and frequently ſupported by conſiderable Bets, as to the time of its concluſion; and theſe circumſtances are as familiar ſubjects of converſation among the parties themſelves, as if they were matters of the moſt trifling importance.

It would ſurpriſe many a prudent, honeſt, and domeſtic man, even in this Age, if he ſhould be told, that one Gentleman had aſked another, as a matter of ordinary diſcourſe, how long it would be before he ſhould be ruined; nevertheleſs, this is not only a common queſtion, but is as often anſwered without heſitation; and ſometimes with all the forms of calculation, as to the months or

years in which it is moſt likely to take place. This, as I before hinted, is no uncommon ſource of Wagers; to the completion of which, the moſt preciſe definition of being undone, and wherein it may, in any particular inſtance, be ſuppoſed to conſiſt, is examined, for the ſatisfaction of thoſe who riſk their money upon the queſtion. Some may call this Refinement; I think it too ſoft a name. It is rather an inſenſibility to every thing which gives value to Life, or honour to the Human Character.

I once knew a young man, and he was called a young Man of Spirit, who, receiving a friendly hint from a perſon that loved him, of his extravagance and diſſipation, replied, with the moſt tranquil unconcern, that what remained of his Fortune would laſt very well to a certain time; and that, from his conſtitution, and the liberties he continued to take with it, he did not believe that he himſelf ſhould hold out longer; ſo that his Life and the means of enjoying it would, he hoped, nearly expire together. He was, however, woefully miſtaken; for he ſurvived the ruins of his Eſtate ſome years, and was a melancholy ſpectacle of diſeaſe and poverty to his death.

No greater proof of modern extravagance need be required, than the frequent Auctions of the property of *living* perſons. Do we not daily ſee thoſe ancient Seats which have been conſidered as

almoſt ſacred by former poſſeſſors, diſmantled by the rude hand of their extravagant Owners, and every thing that had given ſplendor to hoſpitality, borne away to the Auction Room; while it as often happens, that the domeſtic apparatus of modern magnificence is almoſt without an interval of repoſe between the Warehouſe of the Upholſterer and the Repoſitory of the Auctioneer.

Perſons of eminence in the latter profeſſion poſſeſs, I am moſt credibly informed, ſuch a ſurpriſing inſight into future events, as to have a long previous knowledge of the greater part of thoſe Lots which are to receive their future fate from the ſtroke of their Hammers. Nay, I have it from undoubted authority, that they will, frequently, direct the attention of their particular friends to the well-furniſhed houſes of many in the actual flouriſh of High Life, for a ſpeedy decoration of their own.

I am ſorry to ſay it, but theſe Auctions are ſo many genteel, Honourable, and Right Honourable Bankruptcies; though without the forms, and, too frequently, without the juſtice of a legal Commiſſion. I might produce a long train of circumſtances to prove a ſimilarity; but I will not diſgrace, by ſuch a compariſon, the honeſt Tradeſman, who may, by various unforeſeen accidents, be reduced to this ſituation without the leaſt imputation of his Diligence, his Skill, or his Integrity.

It is an ill wind (ſays the Proverb) *that blows no one good!* The Gentlemen of the Wooden Hammer ſeem to thrive moſt by modern diſſipation. Indeed, I have not a doubt, but the HEIRS of Mr. CHRISTIE and Mr. TATTERSALL will look down upon many an impoveriſhed Lord, &c. whoſe Father's extravagance, or perhaps his own, has helped towards the increaſe of their ample poſſeſſions. Nay, if with their Fortunes they ſhould inherit the Genius of their Anceſtors; if thus qualified by nature they ſhould catch the flame of Ambition, and aim at Greatneſs; who knows but the property of Kingdoms may hereafter paſs through their hands, and that in the growing refinements of Corruption, they may poſſeſs the Golden Hammer of a Miniſter, and knock down the Honours and Emoluments of the State, Titles and Ribbons, Places and Penſions, to the beſt Bidder?

From the conduct of too many in High Life, theſe ideas might be greatly amplified; but to indulge them in all their latitude, would be to write a large Volume, inſtead of a ſhort Preface. I ſhall, therefore, leave theſe hints to be improved by thoſe who have abler pens, and better information than myſelf. I have rouſed the Game; and it will be their taſk, I hope, to drive it into the toils, and hold it forth as an example to Mankind.

THE

THE AUCTION.

DARK was the morn which uſher'd in the day,
That bore VAINETTA from herſelf away.
The low'ring clouds, in pity for her pain,
Diſtill'd their drops of ſympathizing rain.
Capricious Sleep, that thro' the troubled night
Had left her ſoul a prey to ſad affright,
At morning's dawn diſpell'd her tort'ring fears,
And for a few ſhort hours dried up her tears.
Now gaudy Fancy, with her painted Train
Of antic Viſions, ſported o'er her brain,
And ſcatter'd airy pleaſures as ſhe paſs'd;
Alas! thoſe pleaſures were not made to laſt!

Too ſoon from dreams of joy the Fair-one 'woke,
The creaking door her golden ſlumbers broke.
Starting, in wild diſorder up ſhe roſe:
The quick but ſad remembrance of her woes,
With recollected torture, eager preſt
Its thorny ſorrows on her tender breaſt.
In ſilent haſte the toilette is prepar'd;
But, ah! VAINETTA's eyes no longer dar'd,
With watchful look and lengthen'd zeal, to trace
The doubtful beauty of her bloated face,
Now hideous grown with anxious, pining care,
Hagg'd with deſpite and blubber'd with deſpair.
When grateful fumes of chocolate ariſe,
She views the *Dreſden* equipage, and ſighs;
Sighs to reflect ſhe may no more behold
Its gloſſy whiteneſs, gay with ſtreaky gold;
Sighs, that in *Gr——n-ſtreet* no longer ſhe
Can idly dawdle o'er her morning's tea,

And

And glean the new-born ſcandal of the Town,
As proud of other's follies as her own *.
In vain the attending Miniſters divide
The flowing treſſes, or, in borrow'd pride,
Attach the ringlets: Quick, her hands diſplace,
With rude attack, the honours of her face.
Before the once-lov'd ſhrine ſhe cannot ſtay;
Half-dreſs'd and unberoug'd, ſhe haſtes away;
And, weeping, bellows, in diſtracted tone,
" A chair! A chair! I languiſh to be gone!"
Onward thro' many a gilded room ſhe paſs'd,
And on the gaudy ſplendors look'd her laſt;

* That Vanity which juſtifies our own follies to ourſelves, will ever be found to aſſume importance, and derive ſatisfaction from thoſe of others.

Look'd

Look'd and bemoan'd her unrelenting fate,
That ſunk her ſo beneath the Vulgar Great * ;
Then hid her weeping eyes, and inly mourn'd,
That ſhe who dar'd depiſe ſhould now be ſcorn'd.
Enrag'd, upon a couch, her length ſhe threw,
And in theſe accents ſpoke her ſad Adieu !

" Wou'd I had dy'd before my Taſte had ſhewn
" A brilliant Pattern to an envious Town ;

* The *Great Vulgar* are thoſe perſons of rank and fortune who, contented with a wiſe maintenance of their dignity, pleaſed with domeſtic ſociety, and honoured by acts of well-applied bounty and hoſpitality, have not the ſpirit to practiſe thoſe vices, nor the taſte to engage in thoſe follies, which end in ruin. On the contrary, the *faſhionable Great* are thoſe Perſons of rank and ſpirit, who ſacrifice to the follies of the preſent moment all the comforts of future life; who will expend an immenſe ſum in Furniture, Equipage, &c. to poſſeſs an unimportant ſplendor for three or four winters, when, amid the ſmiles of thoſe who partook of it, and who in the midſt of it foretold its concluſion, they muſt conſign it all to the diſpoſal of an Auctioneer, who, perhaps, to ſave the indignity of a ſale at their own Houſes, will, as a particular mark of reſpect to them, purchaſe it at a fourth part of the original value.

" That

" That now, ungrateful, triumphs in my pain ;
" Or worſe, inſults me with a pitying ſtrain.
" Sure ſome ill-omen'd Sprite was ſent to guide
" My youthful footſteps in the paths of Pride,
" Whoſe magic power, and unreſiſted art,
" In ſecret chains ſecur'd my thoughtleſs heart ;
" And in one giddy moment turn'd to nought
" Each thrifty precept that my Mother taught.
" But Life's a ſcene of miſery and woe,
" No age or ſtate does real comfort know.
" In early days, beneath a Parent's care,
" Forc'd to my morning and my evening prayer,
" I learn'd the ſaintly look, and hypocritic air.
" In a ſmall room, and full three ſtories high,
" A kind of grown-up Miſs's Nurſery,
" I paſſed my time beneath that harſh reſtraint,
" Which language cannot tell, nor fancy paint ;

" Our youthful, playſome ſpirits, kept in awe
" By the ſtern rigours of maternal law,
" Ne'er aim'd at higher joys than to beſtow
" Our eager gazings on the ſtreets below.
" Happy indeed, if, on the Firſt of May,
" The dancing chimney-ſweeper came that way.
" No balmy fluids did our breakfaſt grace,
" Thin, wat'ry porridge ill ſupplied their place;
" Nor ever did the fragrant butter ſpread
" Its yellow ſurface on the ſcanty bread.
" At length the time arriv'd that I was ſhewn,
" In all the honours of my mother's gown,
" To meet the ſneers and cenſures of the Town.
" Yet to preſerve my pride, my Siſters wore
" Each faded robe that I could wear no more.
" But, ah! this World, which I ſo long'd to ſee,
" Prov'd an unintereſting ſcene to me!

" No

" No gentle whiſper from the gazing throng,
" Gave ſweet importance as I paſs'd along:
" Inſtead of praiſes whereſoe'er we came,
" Continued cenſure hung upon our name.
" Around the Fair the youthful Nobles bow'd;
" We ſtood alone unnotic'd in the crowd.
" At length the unexpected *Hymen* came:
" Pleas'd with its freedom, tho' without its flame,
" I ruſh'd into the pleaſures of the Ton,
" Laugh'd at the world, and *was myſelf alone*.
" Dreſs, Equipage, Diverſions, all ſupply
" Freſh fuel for the flame of Vanity.
" But, oh! Diverſions, Equipage, and Dreſs,
" Did not procure the expected happineſs!
" To make it worſe, one Mother ſhook her head,
" The other ſorrow'd o'er my barren bed;

" While

" While ſcare-brain *V*——*s* hopp'd from fair to fair,
" As careleſs of himſelf as of an heir.
" But ſtill, at times, the World's gay, giddy ſcene
" Baniſh'd the vapours, and diſpell'd the ſpleen;
" Some pleaſure yet was found amid the ſmart,
" —The World ſaw not the ſorrow at my heart.
" Shrouded in ſplendor, I could well beguile
" The ſecret care with hypocritic ſmile.
" But Fortune ſnatch'd the gilded maſk away,
" And forc'd the hidden ſorrow into day;
" Expos'd me to the taunting ſneers of thoſe
" Who, leſſen'd by my triumphs, were my foes;
" And ſtrew'd our names, with long-continu'd rage,
" Upon the *Mornin*'s foul and tainted page.
" Devon in laughter will my fate bewail,
" And antic Derby triumph in the tale.

" Now

" Now let her triumph—but the time may come,
" When CHRISTIE's Hammer ſhall pronounce her doom;
" That magic ſymbol, whoſe Circean art
" Will from theſe walls make every charm depart;
" Tear all their gay and ſplendid trappings down,
" And ſcatter them throughout the greedy Town.

" Ye glitt'ring Luſtres, whoſe reflecting ray
" Charm'd wond'ring night with all the glare of day,
" Perhaps it may be your diſgraceful doom
" To decorate ſome vile Aſſembly-room.
" Thou cryſtal Mirror! whoſe tranſparent face
" With gratitude return'd the frequent grace
" To every Belle and Beau that glanc'd aſide
" To ſnatch the faithful image of their pride;
" Who knows, but in ſome City-Tavern plac'd,
" To glutton eyes you may reflect the feaſt!

" Some purſe-proud Cit, who, tir'd of foggy air,
" Deſerts old *Broad-ſtreet* for *St. James's-ſquare*,
" May preſs this downy Couch, and loll in yonder Chair.
" Ye ſplendid forms, the gay and coſtly boast
" Of *Seve* and *Dreſden*, where will you be loſt!
" No more from you will ſav'ry incenſe riſe,
" To wake the ſenſe to evening ſacrifice;
" O'er ſome old-faſhion'd gaudy chimney plac'd,
" Your Owner, bleſs'd with pride, but void of taſte,
" May leave your beauties to the duſt a prey,
" And let your orient colours fade away.
" Ye ſilken Sofas, gay in ſtreaky dreſs
" Of varied colours, in what dark receſs
" Will you be hid? To paltry crimſon dy'd,
" You may become the Brothel's only pride!

" Such

" Such is my fate; and ſuch the ſad rewards
" Of Folly, Faſhion, Vanity, and Cards.
" Oh then, farewel! ye gay, much-lov'd delights!
" Ye days of pleaſure, and ye feſtive nights!
" The ribbon'd ſteed, the varniſh'd Vis-a-vis,
" The figure of the Dame of Quality;
" The envy-ſtirring Plume, and ſplendid Dreſs,
" Pride, Pomp, and circumſtance of happineſs,
" That oft throughout the wond'ring Town has ſhone;
" Farewel! VAINETTA'S OCCUPATION'S GONE!

" Oh Brother B—— ! had I been like you,
" To ev'ry ſordid intereſt meanly true;
" Like you had borne, with ſmiles, the general ſneer
" Of all degrees, from *Thomas* to a Peer;
" Then had I 'ſcap'd this mortifying woe,
" Nor ſoaring high, had ſunk ſo very low.
" —And muſt I quit the dear enchanting Ton
" For *Henley*'s Shades, and Step-Dame GR——SON!

" Or

" Or ſometimes be admitted, as a treat,
" To take my beef's cheek-pye in G——r-ſtreet!
" Or, mid the vapours of a ſulky day,
" To weep with ever-weeping D———A!"

She could no more; but with a parting eye
Glanc'd o'er the ſcene of ſplendid miſery:
Then ſought, with dubious haſte, th' attending Chair:
Its hackney'd bearers hurry off their fare.
One ſolitary Footman walk'd before,
And gave the unwelcome rap at H——'s door:
There poor VAINETTA enter'd, with a ſigh,
To learn new ſyſtems of Oeconomy.

THE END.

Lately publiſhed, by J. BEW, No. 28, *Pater-Noſter-Row*,
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By the AUTHOR of The DIABOLIAD.